

## Poetic Utterance & American Republicanism: Collective Voice, Self-Representation, and Equality On the Printed Page in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic Poetry

### I. Introduction:

This project explores the role of poetry in the print culture of 19<sup>th</sup> century America and in particular, how poetic genres contributed to the cultivation of an American republican self-understanding. In so doing I take my bearings from a widely influential body of work that links modern democratic societies to the development of a “public sphere,” a space of deliberation, debate, and related forms of communicative exchange. While the role of published writings has long been seen as central to the institutionalization of the public sphere (see, e.g., Habermas 1984), democratic theorists in the American tradition have been extremely select in the genres they identify as critical to the development of public speech and to the cultivation of communicative skills that might sustain a democratic culture. In particular, democratic theorists have overlooked the most ubiquitous form of published writing in 19<sup>th</sup> century America – poetry, and in particular, the lyric. With themes as varied as friendship, mourning, and love at a distance, lyric enabled writers and readers to imagine themselves as participants in a communicative exchange defined by the largely “personal” address of typical experience and emotion – or more broadly, sentimentalism.

Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century cultivated communicative skills that could be said to be at odds with the deliberative conception of public engagement. But if the relatively discrete values of action in concert, self-representation, and equality are

also central to the American republican tradition, nineteenth century poetry was central to its expression. For example, the exchange of emotional experiences was explicitly linked to the formation of commonality and collective ends.<sup>1</sup> Many popular poets engaged with and envisioned forces of alienation – metaphorically in terms of death, physical distance, or lost love – that their poems were poised to overcome. Similarly, romantic poems also frequently depicted the challenge of self-representation, particularly the representation of ordinary experience and vernacular culture, as a task it was uniquely positioned to take on. Poets frequently imagined verse as a communicative skill suited for representing authentic vernacular experience largely ignored in elite artistic traditions. Finally, many romantic poems took on in explicit terms relations of hierarchy and exclusion by seeking to restore to vernacular culture an aesthetic practice of its own.

In all of these cases, 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic poets did not always presume poetry to be the genre of writing that avoided or corrected alienation, an incapacity to self-represent, or inequality, but poets did make the categories of collectivity, representation, and equality into problems or challenges that poetic writing was primed to respond to. Part of the goal of this research is to ask what writers, readers, and theorists of poetry in the nineteenth century imagined to be affordances of poetic genres. When and why, exactly, did poetry become the genre associated with the populist speech acts so central to postrevolutionary challenges to constitutional politics?

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Louise Kete argues that many poems depicted “the power of emotional conversation to form communities” and that the “romantic reading experience [depended] upon the ability of the poet to deploy the grammar and lexicon of shared emotion against what seems to be normative forces of alienation” (23).

Rather than explore how nineteenth century romantic poetry and, in particular the lyric genre of poetry, was used to critique the limits of reason and deliberation in fostering these republican political capacities, I instead want to complicate the picture we have of the relation between the two often opposed categories of writing. One of the ways I do this is by highlighting the location of poetry in the printed texts we normally associate with the institutionalization of the public sphere, including its periodicals, broadsheets, and trade presses. Simply put, in the paradigmatic sites of the 19<sup>th</sup> century republican press, where subjects were most explicitly talking about their relation to the state and issues of common political relevance, poems were, quite literally, all over the place. If one was a reader of the trade journal *Mechanics' Free Press* in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, one could read on one page an editorial on the duration of the work week and on the next a poem on the pains of such strenuous labor. After that, one could generally find an elegy to a deceased lover or a lover who had been separated by distance separated only by a few inches.

The juxtaposition of these forms has been one reason why literary theorist Shira Wolosky has argued that the distinction between private poetic verse and public writing was not as enforced in the nineteenth century. This does not mean that poetry was not recognizable as a distinct genre, only that the exclusive hold prose has over our contemporary imagination of political writing did not seem to extend to nineteenth century Americans' conception of the genres of writing appropriate for political persuasion and appeal.

On the one hand, the more ambiguous nineteenth century distinction between poetry and editorializing prose is not that hard to understand. For instance, we might be able to see how poems on behalf of women's and worker's rights, anti-slavery movements, and even the fair treatment of Native Americans could quite easily register as political texts (or even public speech) in deliberative accounts of the public sphere. While these poems by authors like Lydia Sigourney, William Lloyd Garrison and many more obscure poets do not offer arguments as we might recognize them in political theory, they all made deft reference to the major persuasive appeals relating to these issues at the time. In this way, the personal appeals of the subjective experience of workers, women, slaves and Native Americans mixed with, and sometimes appeared as indistinguishable from, ratio-critical appeals on behalf of shorter work weeks, women's enfranchisement, and abolitionism.

On the other hand, the mode of appeal on offer in most romantic poems – the recounting of personal or collective experience, the appeal to authentic emotion, the more intimate mode of address, and the sympathetic structures – can start to look like a different kind of political claim altogether. This difference has been ground for contemporary debates over the democratic nature of more obscure genres of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature in recent years including melodrama, gothic fiction, and prophecy, to name a few.<sup>2</sup> Appeals made through affect rather than reason, personal experience rather than principle, and unanimity rather than forged disagreement and debate, can make poetry a worrisome genre for many democratic theorists. In a new collection on the 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>2</sup> See Elizabeth Anker on melodrama; Bonnie Honig on gothic romance; George Shulman on prophecy; Patchen Markell on tragedy; , and now Jason Frank on poetry.

poetry of Walt Whitman, a poet known for appeals to collectivity, inclusiveness, and democratic equality, contemporary theorists sharply dispute the valence of his “claims” in these very terms. For example, for Cristina Beltran, at the same time that Whitman’s claims to speak as or for prostitutes, blacks, and women has the potential to “articulate new practices of identification that support democratic forms of equality,” his “adhesive voice also neutralizes conflict, transforming diversity into the aesthetic experience of the sublime while turning serious differences into ‘mere variation’” (Beltran 61). In this way, Whitman’s transcendent and inclusive “I” appears problematic for theorists interested in the invocation of particular experience to generate disagreement, not unanimity.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, poets that appealed to unspoken or intuitive commonality -- through poetry -- appeared to generate a level of assent or consensus synonymous with extreme brands of populism.

At the same time, work by radical democratic theorists on the neglected aesthetic dimensions of public communicative exchange suggests that these dimensions of self-constitution were essential acts of republican life, as dangerous as they were. Even the construction of a public sphere of rational individuals in debate requires the (aesthetic) construction of a common political object and equal participants in communicative exchange (see Jacques Ranciere 2000). Nineteenth century romantic poets, then, used verse and personal experience to make actors including women, ordinary Americans,

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<sup>3</sup> Even theorists like Arendt interested in an appeal to subjective experience as a preferable method to appeal to justice or principle, would be worried because poetry’s appeal to aesthetic and subjective experience fosters not disagreement over taste but consensus. This reading of Arendt is fostered by is also what makes the poetic different than Disch’s characterization of Arendt’s interest in story-telling. the thinking of story-telling is that it is inclusive not because the experience it purports is generalizable but because it allows us to hold multiply particular judgments at once from our perspective as others (Disch 153-57).

slaves appear as equals capable of communicative exchange in the first place and their experiences as objects of political debate. We therefore ought not be surprised by aesthetic appeals, appeals to affective consensus, strong bonds for community underneath law, and image-making works as essential acts of republican community.<sup>4</sup>

At issue in my project is not resolving this tension in democratic theory. Instead, I investigate how poetry, as a specific genre, gets associated with what theorists on both sides of the debate identify as, respectively, the dangerous or necessary acts of self-constitution, collective voice, and self-representation in the first place. Whether we think of fictions of people-hood as delusional (deliberative), necessary (radical democratic theorists), or both (agonists), we may still want to attend to how these populist discourses are made. I aim to understand how poetry is imagined to give form to populist speech acts and whether that association is feasible. To extent that a metaphor like collective voice, for example, might appear to us as central to 19<sup>th</sup> century versions of populism, how does poetry get associated with it? On the one hand, poetry seems like an important place to look given its deep association with forms of expressive speech and voice; on the other hand, are the things we think are present in this genre, like voice and self-representation, really there?

Using new research on lyric in literary studies, I will argue that readings of poems as collective projections of voice, as self-expressive utterances, and as equality on the page, are not clear. This interpretation of poetry, in fact, appears to be an inherited

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<sup>4</sup> These dimensions of public communicative acts are what Patchen Markell refers to as a people's participation in the claiming and constitution of the terms of its own action in concert.

reading of lyric as a genre generated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This means that what we perceive as an important distinction in poetic writing – lyric as a first-person, present tense exchange of emotion – may not be important at all. Lyric poetry read as expressive of an individual or collective subjectivity is drawn largely from only a few poetic thinkers who offer a depiction of poetry as the overheard expressions of a writer in solitude. (These include Hegel, who elevated the lyric form to the status of “pure representation of subjectivity” or the subject “himself as with himself” (Jackson and Prins 3) and John Stuart Mill who imagined poetry as observed soliloquy). As a result, the reading of poetry as “constructing both an ideal self-presence for the speaking voice and an ideal intimacy between that voice and ourselves” (Warner 2002 81) is itself an imposed form.

If it is true that collective voice, self-expression, and extreme relations of equality via communion cannot be attributed to the transcendent “I” of lyric poems, then where do notions of populism get those terms from? Suddenly, terms like voice – already understood as a construction – starts to look like a category with little reference in existing communicative practices. Further, if something like poetry is used to help define the limits or oppositional categories of public speech, what happens to that definition when the thing it is opposed to is not what it seems? This paper will proceed in two sections: first, it will explore why and how poetry came to be read in the way it was and linked to populist political categories; second, it will explore how the suspect attribution of those categories to poetry jeopardizes how we understand those categories to work in political life. In short, this paper traces the slow creation of a genre whose speech acts get associated with particular communicative capacities deemed central to republican life.

## II. Poetic Writing in 19<sup>th</sup> Print Culture: Associations with Voice, Expression and Equality

My research will argue that an alliance between poetic utterance and forms of collective voice, self-expressive representation, and equality developed in the postrevolutionary context. This means that the ubiquitous literary genre of American poetry became (and remained so well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century) understood as a genre of populist expression opposed to the deliberative speech most closely associated with the public sphere. Implicit in this assertion is that there existed a moment when poetic genres were not necessarily understood as different from the deliberative speech acts found in newspapers, editorials, and broadsheets. Nor were they comprised of the utterances of constituting, populist acts that they came to be understood as by more radical democratic theorists. These theorists who have sought recently to reclaim the (always fictive) populist postrevolutionary discourses of American Jacksonian period may leap too quickly to recruit poetry among the figures of collective voice, self-representation and equality. This section aims to temporarily hold off the reading of poetry as a distinct form of public speech and instead trace how or why it might have gradually become linked with the speech acts of voice, expression, and communion.

It isn't until the middle part of the century that poetic utterances began to be imagined as communicative skills necessary for a people to express and represent itself. We see this perhaps most famously in the work of the Transcendentalist poets Whitman



and Emerson, who claimed for poetry a status as the genre most suited for the collective expression of national identity. For Whitman in particular, the poetic genre was a genre of vital and informal speech for giving form to a people “underneath the elections of Presidents and Congress” (*Democratic Vistas* 5, 15). We also see these ideas echoed in poetic thinkers and critics like Rufus Griswold slightly earlier in the century. Yet these connections between poetry and the possibility of self-constituting speech by a people before and below law were not always obvious prior to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While I will not yet question the versions of democratic theory that posit the (always fraught) need for a vision of unanimity and people-hood as an essential part of republican politics, I will begin to undermine some of its generic or literary forms in poetry, at least in the American postrevolutionary context. Why it came to be that poetry was tagged as the bearer of this task is less clear of a story than we might imagine.

Poetry, as a genre for the pure expression of a subject’s affective dimensions including its pain, sorrow, joys, and intents, was harder to extricate from the texts and institutions of ratio-critical discourse before it was seen as an antithesis to critical public speech. The connections between lyric poetry and a critique of the revolutionary Enlightenment subject along with other counter-enlightenment discourses of romantic emotion and aesthetic appeal were not clear in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Briefly put, the communicative skills understood as those that allowed individual subjects to ground their authority in disinterested reason rather than personal affiliation *included* the genre of poetry. As difficult as this may be to imagine, this alliance between deliberative public speech and poetry was made possible not because both included forms

of rational persuasion but because of a particular way of imagining printed textual exchange. In the republican print culture of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, printed publication was a specialized activity that permitted individuals to appear detached from their personal status. To the extent that poetry was printed, often anonymous, and published in the texts of periodicals, pamphlets, and editorials meant that because poetry could appear as disinterested and critical in the same way that editorializing prose was, for example. What we now think of as the “personal” dimensions or intimate forms of address of poetry were, in fact, largely impersonal and generalized. However, the dimensions of the print public sphere that deliberative democratic theorists privileged with the formation of a modern concept of “public” distinct from that of the pre-modern collective gathered to exercise would begin to preclude poetry in the later points of the antebellum period (see Baker 1992).

Tensions between readings of 19<sup>th</sup> century sentimental poetry that emphasized its highly personal, non-rational, and expressive features and those that made it complicit with political critique began to emerge in early theorizing about poetry and its role, but the distinctions were not strict. Early on in republican print culture, poets could reference things like mourning, lost love, and sorrow in their appeal to political issues. In the “performances of emotional affiliation” were not recognized at the time as valuable political texts (Howard). Poetry about temperance and women’s work was found as early as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> in pamphlets and newspapers, serving as addendums to editorials and political critiques. Female “complaint” poems, issue-based poems, and anti-slavery poems in newspapers could encompass or make deft reference to arguments in the

political world; but they often did so in terms of sympathy, pain and loss.<sup>5</sup> Poets like Lydia Sigourney wrote in the subgenre of lyric poetry to advocate for temperance and fair treatment of Native Americans. In both cases, the appeals were personal (in the first person), emotional, and highly persuasive. Poems could do all these things and still remain understood as making rhetorical moves that bolstered, rather than challenged, ratio-critical discourse. Again, this is not to suggest that poems deployed reason, but rather that to the extent that poems circulated in periodicals with their “formalized diction and mode of exposition” distinct from and even irreconcilable with the “conventions of personal exchange” (Warner 1990: 40), poems looked and read as part and parcel of that discourse. The printed word, as opposed to the spoken (or even handwritten) word, according to Michael Warner, was pressed into place for republican purposes such that the “the pamphlet [was] not a personal letter, and must not be” (40). If this was the case, then the poems that were printed in pamphlets were likewise understood as a distinct activity from the personal presence associated with voice or individual address.

As a result, distinctions between personal and public speech, expressive and rational speech did not play out over poetry. We can see this more clearly in an example from the *Mechanics' Free Press (MFP)*<sup>6</sup>, a popular trade press in the 1820s that

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<sup>5</sup> The general visibility of lyric poetry meant that the culture of Romantic sentimentality was “all but entirely mediated by literary texts” (Bennet 11). In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this included prominent novels. But the lyric form was used to deploy sentiment differently than the novel’s use of sympathetic characters: it did so through appeals to commonality, perhaps even consensus, rather than deliberation.

<sup>6</sup> “This voice of the promoters of America’s first citywide trade association” describing the MFP according to one historian “remains one of the most authentic documents of the early labor movement, and of the values and sentiments of the more disaffected of the journeymen who

advocated on behalf of radical Jacksonian conceptions of wage labor. As already mentioned, one could read on one page an editorial essay disclaiming the duration of the work week for urban journeyman and on the next a poem in metrical verse depicting the same cause and from the same critical perspective. For example, addressing the claims of a limited workweek under the pen name of “Mallet”, one author in 1828 invoked the “heavy yoke upon our neck / Is placed: but we will try / Th’ ignoble badge of pow’r to break: – / From SIX to SIX or die!”. The poem offers a rallying cry for a familiar political cause to workers in the early parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a shortened work week. More than that, its call to all “Ye honest men who work by line” made reference to typically virtuous depictions of workers engaged in “noble work” over and against the effeminate and corrupt owners of capital who did no such labor. While the poem offers little addition to the theoretical debates over the rights of workers or to their status as a protected legal category, its reference to owners of capital as “lords” and “tyrants” fit familiar imagery of the radical Jacksonian labor advocates. Hence, what appears as “poetic” imagery was the stuff of editorials as well. One can start to detect poetry’s use of vernacular forms in this poem’s use of rhythmic chants mimicking that of crowd actions. However, the mode of expression in this poem hardly seems “personal” even as it personifies the claims of labor in experiences of pain and sorrow.

What explains the particular rhetorical authority of this poem – if it is not in its personal expression or appeal to subjective experience in any ways that would distinguish it from editorial prose – may instead be found in the sense the poet makes of his or her

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experienced the first phases of industrialization” (Blumin, Stuart: The emergence of the middle class, 122)

own occasion of writing. In other words, the turn to poetry is explained within the poem. As the poet explains, to demand shorter work weeks has and will continue to fall on deaf ears and so part of his or her task becomes constructing the scene whereby their claims becomes sensible to their interlocutors. As the author explains, “Our lords have proved how we endure / A load of wasting toil” but have managed only to press them into service for longer and longer hours. When called upon to respond with a clear reason why the owners should desist, the poet continues:

In vain does Science spread her store,  
And arts invite pursuit;  
We’re barr’d from every kind of Lore;  
‘Tis our forbidden fruit!  
We have no time to gaze upon  
The teeming earth of sky!  
But we *will* have—ye hearts of stone—  
From six to six or die!

The major assertion of this stanza is that the workers have no words with which to compose their appeal. Not only is the worker denied the time to reflect on his or her reasons, but any discourse to which they might appeal on their own behalf is barred to them. This includes the generalized tools of reason and science but it also importantly includes “Lore” or folklore. This means the place of worker, as subject of public concern or actor capable of speech, has not been established; it does not yet exist amongst the heroic figures of oppression. For this author, the workers must, therefore, constitute their own “Lore” or, in the face of this failure, simply insist. Setting the entire appeal to verse inserts and enacts workers as subjects of something like an epic ballad. Yet even this seems to fail, and all that is left is the demand, framed in the form of the voice of workers singing “From six to six or die!”. The poem’s final line refers almost outside of itself to a

chanted slogan sung or spoken collectively – not quite by the author, but by all workers everywhere.

The drama is framed as an expression of voice, but not one that yet is opposed to reason, even as it cannot appeal to reason. Rather than say that the depiction of this communicative skill points to a limit in the deliberative communicative sphere, we can instead, following Jacques Ranciere, suggest that the poem points to the aesthetic components of deliberative communicative situations in the first place. The very presupposition that there is a common object of concern, or that the terms of exchange demanded equals to the task of communicating, requires the very real, very aesthetic struggles to establish those objects in common and the equality of speakers (see Panagia with Ranciere 114).<sup>7</sup> These acts, then, are aesthetic in that they are made on the part of those who are not yet visible as political actors. We might say that these utterances – that is, the utterance in the poem of the slogan – is an auto-poetic rather than autonomic act. This means that it appears as if self-constituting rather than part of any existing discourse in which the category of workers are already a given (Frank 183).

The aesthetic dimensions of poetry as self-representing or self-constituting has real empirical backing at this moment: the uses of poetry by workers, women, and African-Americans frequently denied access to the institutions of the public realm is well

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<sup>7</sup> This is what Jacques Ranciere calls the aesthetic dimensions of the deliberative communicative sphere. “The existence of a priori pragmatic constraints that compel interlocutors to enter into a relation of intercomprehension, if they wish to be self-coherent. This presupposes further that both the interlocutors and the objects about which they speak are preconstituted; whereas, from my perspective, there can be political exchange only when there isn’t such a preestablished agreement— not only, that is, regarding the objects of debate but also regarding the status of the speakers themselves” (116).

documented. Groups regularly excluded from the public sphere due to their inability to detach from their particular identity, including women, labor, and African-Americans, wrote as the disinterested and abstracted writers of lyric poems.<sup>8</sup> The lyric poem was, to use Kristen Silva Greusz's characterization, "the genre through which an aspiring writer [could] most easily enter the literary field" (G 26).<sup>9</sup> We might, then, say that poetry was idiomatic and vernacular. We can begin to see why later poets and thinkers of poetry like Whitman and Emerson could imagine poetry to be the genre through which American could "sing themselves" into being (Emerson). Its status as vernacular meant that it could appear as self-generated, belonging to the popular classes rather than elites, and emanated up from the culture organically. so real as to appear an almost authentic aesthetic image-making work of a people contra elites. The people were imagined as both author of this vernacular and its effect, to use Jason Frank's characterization of Whitman's theory of poetry.

The appearance of poetry as the vernacular expression of a self-constituted people began to take shape in relation to its aesthetic use. The construction of subjects acting in concert was facilitated via what Kerry Larson has called poetry's trafficking in "instantly recognizable" tropes or emblems (83). Lyric poets privileged experience that was general

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<sup>8</sup> A rich literature on the exclusions from the public sphere of ratio-critical discourse has been in place for several decades. Michael Warner's study of the public sphere notes that the demands of impersonal and partial breaks from status to enter the public sphere were denied to groups like women, African-American because the relation of negativity demanded of writing were denied their gender, race, socioeconomic.

<sup>9</sup> The broadly democratic quality of poetry in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century has been attributed to its meter, rhyme, and rhythmic templates (Gruesz 26) that made it suited to memorization. It also had deep roots in early American public school curriculae (Kete 31). Kerry Larson has added that "the very conventionality of its cadences and the familiarity of its imagery, allowed unprecedented numbers of men and women to demonstrate a refinement and cultural literacy that prose alone did not provide" (Larson 2).

and repeatable rather than particular and singular. This allowed “a wide range of readers/auditors from different points on the literacy continuum to understand, enjoy and repeat these verses” (Greusz 25). This likely resulted in mid-century lyric poetry’s “tendency toward cliché”, “formula, and repetitiveness” (xx). In this regard, the explicit “image-making” works of the American romantic poets like William Cullen Bryant, Emerson, Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Lydia Sigourney created a repository of experiences shared by citizens.<sup>10</sup> This is made explicit by Emerson and Whitman and other poetic thinkers. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman called for a national literature, and “especially its archetypal poems”, to invoke the “aggregate of heroes, characters... common to all, typical of all... comprehending and effusing... what is universal, native, common to all, inland and seaboard” (9). Poetic critic Rufus Griswold described poetry as less “the chime and flow of words” than a “mysterious feeling, which combines man with the world around him, in a chain / Woven of flowers, and dipp’d in sweetness” (*The Poets and Poetry of America*, Griswold 201).<sup>11</sup>

None of this yet means that poetry was imagined as distinct from public or deliberative speech to the extent that, as I have already argued, deliberative communicative exchange required the struggle over common objects and equal actors in

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<sup>10</sup> For more on theories of sub-legal, informal and aesthetic constituent acts, see Alan Keenan, “Promises, Promises”; also Jason Frank on constituent moments; Jeremy Waldron on “Precommitment and Disagreement”; Patchen Markell on the affective and particular dimensions of constitutionalism; and George Shulman to name just a few.

<sup>11</sup> The understanding of poetry as something more than a form of writing but an arrangement of reader to speaker was already apparent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. J.S. Mill’s essay on poetry noted the definition of poetry should move away from considerations of “metrical composition” and instead about the particular relationship it set up between author and reader, author and poem, and poem and the conditions of its production. As much as we may deny Mill’s turn away from the written word, what Mill implicitly points to in this political characterization of poetry as social practice: that is, it was also a way of writing and of reading.



order to work. In this way, the romantic poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was doing the work of public deliberative spheres. Yet as tensions in postrevolutionary America between populist demands, elites, and the system of constitutionalism that was supposed to mediate between them grew, so did tensions within the discourse of print culture.

For the revolutionary period, print culture – and its ultimate instantiation in a system of constitutional law – had served as the mediating site between a people against and below law and law’s authors. To see how this worked, we can look briefly at Michael Warner’s and Keith Baker’s conception of the uses of print culture and public deliberative discourse in the revolutionary period. For Warner, for example, “the presence of the people to themselves in oral assembly was for them not a legitimate marker of authority precisely because it resembled the at-whim, command-oriented and unrestrained sovereign authority they had dismantled in the revolution (103). Print culture, as a technological media imagined as distinct from speech in person, enabled republican citizens to imagine printed utterances as something other than the equivalent of expressions of will. To use Warner’s terms again, “whereas in *speech*, persons hearing themselves speak, are present to themselves and responsible for their language, *writing* migrates from persons arbitrarily” and generates the effect of being something other than expressive or emanating directly from a people (emphasis mine).<sup>12</sup> This generates the necessary effect of print as distinct from the act of personal expression or self-representation; it puts distance between those acts. Warner explains that “what was needed for legitimacy” in a postrevolutionary world was a site for a people representing

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<sup>12</sup> This had important implications for political texts (including official ones like published constitutions). For deliberative public sphere theorists, this tension between a people-in-assemble and the people-in-print, with the latter winning out with the triumph of a text like the constitution.

itself simultaneously as both author and subject of its laws: reasoned public discourse could generate those texts to the extent that it appeared as authored impersonally and indirectly. For Warner, print culture of ratio-critical discourse became imagined as “the derivative afterward of writing rather than the speech of the people” (104). Put another way, it was imagined as a communicative practice that did not mimic voice and did not entail the goal of representation of a people as its basis of authority. For Keith Baker, this was the mark of the modern public against the ancient republican conception of a people gathering in collective presence.

Poetry, in its present tense, direct address, and mode of mimicking collective voice, seemed at risk of being cut off from this mode of printed discourse. It was not as long as printed poems also circulated arbitrarily, could also be authored anonymously, and avoided association with direct speech. Yet its gradual distinction from this sphere of printed texts happened as tensions in the postrevolutionary context began to upset the order of public opinion and its attendant constitutionalism. Gradually, poetry began to get linked with the construction of an indissoluble people before or underneath law that was emerging in other sites in the Jacksonian period, for example in the revival of images of a people-in-person rather than in print. Poetry, as a present-tense, expressive genre began to be taken as something different from the “derivative afterward of speech”; instead, it seemed to mimic immediate and unmediated expression.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It was also authoritative because “closely allied in English thought with the people’s right to assemble and to present grievances to the government” (Wood 312). Devices included conventions, representative instructions, people at large, and voice (Wood 372), an authority extended beyond voting and delegation, but residing in them. Debates over the constitution of the people were triggered by major sectional and class-based crises particularly with regard to the national bank and slavery and directed particular against elite aristocracy.

Much has been made of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century pushes for expansion of the franchise and political office holding for laboring classes. Less has been made of postrevolutionary revivals of constitutional conventions along with claims for the capacity to question or disobey the founding texts on the grounds that its appeal to collective authorship was illegitimate and fantastical (see Sean Wilentz). Furthermore, suspicion over public opinion as a viable authority and valuable check on the will of the “people” began to be questioned as the constitutional order – used to defend policies like the creation of a national bank or the institution of slavery – appeared to be a tool of elites rather than a representation of the people. Put another way, questions over whether the people were active authors of their laws began to be real questions; and in the face of these sectional crises, populist claims in the face of constitutional order and the uses of public reason began to gain steam. These populist figures of a people before law became essential part of the Jacksonian discourse long before they made their way into claims by Whitman and Emerson about poetry. Emphasizing a brand of constituent power – or a power located in the eruptive, informal, and disobedient capacities of a people to constitute themselves -- Jacksonians began to require institutions where such capacities were evident. This appeal would find part of its generic form in the possibility of an eruptive, informal and originary genre of speech: poetry.

It is no accident that poets like Whitman and Emerson referred explicitly to poetry as a genre of speech capable of invigorating a people below or against law. The discourse of official corruption and weak collective affiliation permeated postrevolutionary

rhetoric. Whitman imagined that the “new blood, new frame of democracy [that could not] be vivified and held together merely by political means, superficial suffrage, legislation” (9) required something like poetry. Whitman proposed an almost gothic account of federal law as examples of the “low cunning... prematurely ripe... muddy complexion, bad blood” (15) of collective appeals made by elite official. Instead, what was needed was a sublime appeal to public affection “underneath the elections of Presidents and Congress” (DV 5, 15). This was couched in revolutionary-era gendered terms of the “soft and effeminate” political elites (Wood 52) as well as the self-constituting vigor of a people outside of the state, in their vernacular and cultural forms (Bailyn 160). In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the difference was that Whitman and Emerson had a literary genre to which they could appeal that was poised to be the site for just this kind of expression. A people practiced in the eruptive verse of poetry only could engage in the corrective practices of collective voice, self-representation, and equality that the state could not and that other literary genres could not.

New democratic theorists have revisited just such claims as crucial components of postrevolutionary American political life. In so doing, they have recruited the genre of poetry among the forms of consensus or unanimity that deliberative theorists, in turn, have opposed to the modern republican public. These other practices include various forms of precommitment, populism, formal unity, and public affection. In this way, to use Patchen Markell’s terms, citizens referred to “the norms ‘behind’ a constitution [that] become objects of identification and loyalty only via an admixture of particularity” (51). Likewise, as Jeremy Waldron argues, it may be inevitable that the more that citizens are

asked to be “bound by legislation that commands anything less than unanimous support [i.e. rule by law]... then it must be because they have constituted themselves as a political entity” prior to such legislation (287). What starts to emerge in this account of republicanism is the opposition of public sphere communicative acts and those that require different kinds of resources. Amongst the public sphere institutions putatively “liberated from the logics of sovereignty” (Frank 45) new theorists have uncovered, in fact, a “dizzying array of self-created revolutionary institutions” that claimed to “speak” for the people (Frank 17). These included renewed popular constitutional conventions, quasi-legal town hall conventions, and, finally, at the aesthetic level, appeals by poets like those of Whitman to a people capable of speaking outside of and below the level of law.<sup>14</sup> This association of poetry with the radical instantiations of this democratic populism required that poetry in print be de-linked from the public sphere and re-imagined as a purely personal and emotional exchange. In other words, it had to become associated with a communicative exchange not yet evident, for example, in the workers’ trade press poems. For Whitman to imagine poetry as the mode through which prostitutes, slaves, and other marginalized people could speak meant that poetry had to become associated with forms of collective voice and self-representation.

But again, how exactly this happens – given poetry’s longstanding affiliation with the print culture of the early republic – requires a little more explanation. How a genre becomes linked to the political capacities of collective voice and self-representation and

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<sup>14</sup> For the first time since the revolution, the very questions over “who” had authored the constitution – the very questions that the authority of public law had supposedly done away with – began to re-emerge. Though theorists have pointed out that these questions were not features of the original debate, they became overtly so in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

away from the deliberative sphere requires a reconfiguration of its generic qualities. For it to happen, poetry had to become linked to the romantic “intensity, striving, and resisting constraint” of a people before law that, in turn, became associated with the informal constituent power of a people (Rosenblum 17). More than that, it had to become a site for the expression of a “pure” and unrestrained subjectivity that it had not been previously.

This association happens via lyric poetry’s gradual interpretation as that utterance of a pure (collective and/or individual) and transcendent subject. The resources for this association are found in the love poems and elegies printed in and alongside the workers’ poems of the trade presses and with which the workers’ poems were associated. Recall that immediately next to the poems on work weeks and slavery were poems on love and loss that offered an ostensibly different iteration of the poetic subject. For example, we find poems titled “To Miss—“ that reads as an ode to a lover at distance. The lover, who can’t communicate with his addressee because she is “Far—far—o’er the sea”, is asked to think of him in absence. “When thy joys are bright and gay, Far—far—o’er the sea; / When thy wandering thoughts will stray, Then think dear girl of me”. Another poem, “Addressed to Miss M.R.” depicts an author imploring his lover “Mary, don’t sigh, that awhile we are parted / These moments are sweeter, the quicker they roll; We’ll meet oft to see that we will still be true hearted”. Finally, consider the poem that follows “From Six to Six or die!” It is an elegy penned under the name “Julius” to a deceased lover. The author tries to do justice to his lover by remembering her, not in words but in thought. He does this by being

Far removed from ev'ry harsher noise,  
Here let my busy thoughts in silence rove,  
Repeat the fleeting scenes of former joys,  
And the soft anguish of a faithful love

Though ultimately the lover's death overwhelms any attempt by the author to conjure her, the communicative scenario set up in this poem is one that will become thematic for much 19<sup>th</sup> century poetry. Mary Kete explains that this trope of "bridging the distance" was a key formula of lyric poems, invoking both the tropes of epistolary paths (despite poems just as often not traveling in the form of letters) as well as the "pathos of distance" generated by the solitary communicative act of writing rather than speaking. In this way, the "drama" of lyric poems entailed the overcoming of a situational relationship between writer and reader – the writer alone at a distance from the reader. This configuration, peculiar to the imagined occasion of lyric writing, will get used to various ends by thinkers of poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to depict the lyric poem as the "record of the voice or the mind speaking to itself" (J&P 2). The key thing to note is that lyric poetry utilized this convention more than other genres, thereby setting up a unique (and imagined) occasion of communicative exchange.

These poems also suggest, by virtue of the absence of their addressee (their anonymous lover) and the audience's imagined position as an indirect addressee of the poem (we might imagine ourselves as overhearing the poem), that the thoughts being communicated are of the deepest sort. The imagined "lack of artifice" (Kete 23) that was enabled by a distance from one's audience became a privileged communicative capacity of the poetic world for some critics. The overheard solitude of the author and the petrified mute figure of address never to respond become key markers for the meaning of

this genre. Critics as far ranging as Hegel elevated the lyric form to the status of “pure representation of subjectivity” (Prins 3), of mastering the speech that arises of the subject “himself as with himself” (3). For John Stuart Mill,

poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling: but, if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience. The peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener.

Poetry, because it was not meant to be communicated to an audience, did not depend on the persuasive tactics of eloquent speech. It was, therefore, expressive of a pure subjectivity. For readers of deliberative tradition like Warner, what defined poetry of the lyric genre was that it imagined itself not “as communication but as our silent insertion into the self-communion of the speaker, constructing both an ideal self-presence for the speaking voice and an ideal intimacy between that voice and ourselves” (81). This depiction comes directly from the accounts of poetry above. Poetry becomes read as soliloquy in public or expressions of pure subjectivity in solitude: written alone and read alone enable a communion between writer and reader not available to other genres.

I explore this reading of poetry more closely in the next section. Political poems' separation on the printed page from editorial prose and their grouping with lyrical elegies and love poems may have sealed poetry's broader fate as the antithesis of the institutions of the public sphere.<sup>15</sup> Read next to a poetic elegy to a deceased wife, the authorial position, tone and address of the poem “From Six to Six or die!” starts to feel different.

Whereas at first it was possible to read that poem as a kind of editorial on the work week,

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<sup>15</sup> The ambiguity generated rather than negated by the juxtaposition of workers' poems and love poems is productive for my inquiry in a way similar to Simon Goldhill's study of the context of Athenian drama in stately processions.



next to and in light of a reading of poetry as that subjective expression of feeling, the poem now reads as a meditation, although song-like, on the experience of physical labor. In the elegy to the dead lover, the poet's lamentation of fate's taking his beloved away is framed in terms of the feeling of the "Stab smiling joy, and plunge me in despair / With all the weight of love and wo oppressed". These lines appear as a far more personal, and less political, expression of oppression than the workers' poems. As a result, poems like these get read out of the institutions of the public sphere and instead associated with something like the dimensions of authentic interior life. If poems were the site of these kinds of personal expression, it makes sense that poetic utterances, even those that seemed to speak on behalf of political issues, were imagined as expressions of collective voice, self-representation, and equality.

### III. Challenging the "received phenomenologies" of the lyric form: poetry as public communicative speech

Regardless of whether we are willing to assign a public or private status to the elegy in the Mechanics' Free Press, the distinction between a poem like the elegy and the workers' poem is a reasonable one. The elegy, as it sets up a typical lyric scenario, does appear to pose as of brand of pure subjectivity, solitary expression, and even a turn away from audience that we might associate with the private sphere. As a result, it seems hard to think of it as a public text in the same way we might think of an editorial prose as public. Instead, in its appeal to the personal but generic experience of mourning, it seems to imagine itself as an expression of pure subjectivity to which all readers can relate and hence participate in. That is, even if a poem like "From Six to Six or die!" maintains a

particular, non-abstract subject position of a worker, the authorial figure of the elegy seems geared towards instantiating a transcendent republican subject capable of communing with all readers: the experience of mourning is so general that the author's voice could be mine.

Yet in order to read the lyric that way, one needs to ignore other elements of its composition. And in ignoring these other elements, one misses ways in which the poem may offer something other than a transcendent republican subject. As a result, on offer in the lyric is not merely reducible to the skilled subject capable of substantiating collective voice, self-expression, and communion with the reader. Instead, the fiction of such an authorial position upsets its association with what Whitman and contemporary theorists imagine as the self-expressive republican subject. To be clear, the problem is not a problem with democratic theory and the productive tensions between constituent power and a restrained subject. Instead, it is a problem with whether the literary conventions ascribed to the lyric form are plausible reference points for an imagination of the auto-poetic speech act – a speech act that gets associated with the revolutionary and unrestrained dimensions of constituent power in the postrevolutionary period. In this second section I take issue with how poetry is being read by both critics of delusional collective voice and theorists of aesthetic democracy who imagine it as a genre associated with the fraught but necessary skills of collective voice, self-representation and equality.

To emphasize how widespread this reading of lyric poetry is, we need only look at a contemporary reading of Whitman's work that, in fact, celebrates his poetry but only

as a special kind of lyric poetic form. In Jason Frank's essay on Whitman, in which he defends the publicly affective dimensions and auto-poetic dimensions of his verse, Frank stops short of suggesting that all lyric poetry is valuable for republican community. For Frank, Whitman's lyric poetry is valuable only to the extent that it *avoids* succumbing to the aggressively solitary, subjective expressive utterances of most lyric poetry. For Frank, Whitman defies the "undemocratically unitary theory of the subject as expressed by speech" with its "attempts to cleanse language of heteroglot associations" (CM 198) by instead making his lyrics "irreducibly populated with a vast multitude of competing voices" (199). In short, even for a theorist for whom poetry performs the fraught but necessary work of forging a vernacular people below law capable of self-generated speech, the lyric form goes too far in its reduction of this form of utterance to private or subjective speech. In rescuing Whitman's poetic forms from potential critics, Frank reinforces a reading of lyric poetry that is problematic.

There are several problems with Frank's reading of lyric poetry. Besides separating Whitman from a genre with which he inextricably connected, Frank wedges a distinction between Whitman's polyvocal utterances and those of lyric as subjective. Nonetheless, it is precisely Whitman's robust lyric "I" that seems to foster the inclusivity Frank believes he cultivates. For Frank, Whitman's "I" can speak in the "voice of prostitutes" and the "voice of slaves". But the very image of the poet speaking as or for other is due entirely to the very effect Frank disavows in Whitman: the transcendent "I" as which anyone can speak and for which it can speak for anyone. As a result, Frank actually reproduces the reading of lyric poetry as capable of collective voice, self-

representation and communion. Frank's Whitman may not cultivate an individual subjectivity, but the brand of collective voice with which he speaks depends on its purity.

In this section, I question Whitman's brand of lyric for a different reason: not because it distances itself from lyric utterances, but because lyric utterances have been read in problematic ways. The reading of lyric poetry that ascribes to it the skills of pure subjectivity (either individual or collective) misses elements of its form that are at odd with that interpretation. Building on theorists who have attended to the evocation of a people through aesthetic mood and imagery, I enter the fray differently, looking at the way collective voice and popular expression in lyric poetry look different at the level of 1) rhetorical composition, 2) textual (material) form, and 3) citizen-reader reception. Staying focused on these features of lyric poems is important to the extent that these features largely drop out of political theoretical accounts of poetry. For contemporary democratic theorists, for example, poetry looks like a form of theory done differently rather than a writing practice with its own textual practices and reception history. From this perspective, it is not clear that poets are doing the things we think they are with regard to these political categories, including collective voice, self-representation, and communion.

As already mentioned, the presumption that lyric poetry was concerned with self-expression and transcendent subjectivity depends on privileging particular theories of poetry over others. This reading starts to look strained when we compare it to the multiple ways poets constructed their communicative scenes. We can start

problematizing this read by turning to one of its sources, J.S. Mill's theory of poetry. As has already been noted, if anyone subscribes to the idea of the lyric as mind speaking to itself, it is Mill. Yet even his acrobatics with regard to imagining a speech done for and to itself suggest that the scene of solitary or overheard speech is precarious. Take, for example, Mill's metaphor that "all poetry is of the nature of soliloquy. It may be said that poetry which is printed on hot-pressed paper, and sold at a bookseller's shop, is a soliloquy in full dress and on the stage."

Warner's reading of Mill's reading of poetry as self-addressed speech tends to downplay any of the discrepancies in Mill's own account. How, for example, can overheard writing be overheard unless the metaphor one is working with is already a metaphor of voice? How does one imagine away an audience unless one already presupposes it is there? Finally, how does Mill refuse its circulation on "hot-pressed paper" if poetry has not already been long-associated with printed and published form? In order to present the lyric as the purest expression of a nascent subjectivity with which anyone can identify, Mill has to remove it from all particular situations, including the very situation of writing for an audience. Of course, Mill can't fully imagine this. This is in part because Mill is actually fully invested in and concerned with its final address to others: though for Mill the poet is "excluding from his work every vestige of such lookings-forth into the outward and every-day world, and call express his emotions exactly as he has felt them in solitude", audience remains the lingering concern precisely to the extent that it must be imagined away. What Mill depicts here is an intensely public reading and writing practice. It ignores how Mill relies on the very metaphor of

theatricality that poetry is supposed to move away from: soliloquy on stage requires that the poet act as if he is not writing for others. This is not freedom from audience, but an obsession with its reconstitution.

This initial re-reading of Mill's own attempts to substantiate lyric reading as self-addressed starts to reveal cracks in the interpretation of lyric poetry as pure subjectivity.<sup>16</sup> Instead, as I imply, lyric is public speech that seeks to negotiate a different relation to audience, not do away with one altogether. Hence, whatever the position occupied by an "I" in a lyric form, it is not one of pure subjectivity within which everyone could fit. If anything, many lyric poems make such identification either impossible or besides the point.

Take, for example, the construction of the audience as an "absent presence", to use Paula Bennett's terms, that is supposed to foster the imagined position of a self-addressing, subjective speaker. Such a reading of lyric poetry misses the complex ways poets address their subject and illicit response. However, poets often speak very directly to a second person "you" that, while not negating the possibility of the reader entering the "I" of the author, surely limits or repositions the transcendent dimensions of the first person speaker. By "address" we mean the facet of the text by which a reader is conjured. We could read the text as addressed to all, or as addressed to a particular

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<sup>16</sup> While for Warner the novel puts a ton of strain on the republican paradigm as they introduce a "specially private kind of subjectivity" (151), it could at least also introduce "intersubjective recognition and mutual esteem" (Warner 170). Nationalist literature calls subjects into collectives but not into public or civic orientation; membership but not necessarily citizenship. From an empirical level, and with the exception of a relatively short-lived republican literature, the emergence of this public sphere seems to dovetail with literary texts, particularly novels and the non-prose genre of poetry.

person, or, in the case of open letters, addressed to all via a figure of a particular person. But those aren't all the positions. What literary theorists refer to apostrophic address includes address to a quality or abstraction such as "O death" or "O river" or "Miss—". But can I imagine myself as the anonymous "To Miss—" fully and is she kept anonymous to permit such transcendent identification? Or does "Miss—" in fact become a very particular and not always accessible reader, one I must maneuver in relation to? The point is that self-address misses the path the poem takes to the reader through the "you" or the "O"; the lyric "I" as the self-enclosed speaker is hardly self-enclosed. It also presumes that the writer demands no response. In fact, writers of lyric poems often depict the response they want, as we've seen in "To Miss—". The author asks his reader to "think of me".

The writer is not imagined as alone and hence, in some way, purer; nor does the imagined non-arrival of his communiqué allow him to speak more expressively of his true feelings. Instead, it is that the occasion permits for something different, for a different orientation to the public. One of these differences is in terms of the "voice" imagined. Mill's notion of poetry as soliloquy ends up imagining poetry as "voiced" in order to be heard. The metaphor of "voice" presumes arrival. But this is not the case for many lyric poems who play with non-arrival as a condition of their being written in the first place. But rather than mimic the "voice" of crowds and assemblies, many lyric poems use the occasion of non-arrival as a chance to present another kind of metaphor. Some literary theorists have suggested, as is the case with "To Miss—" that the better metaphor is not voice, but thought. If "thought" is the metaphor of communication, then

poetry's association with the practice of collective "voice" seems problematic. Voice as a synecdoche for republican participation may be used in many places, but ascribing it to poetry should at least cause some suspicion. And if poetry is not offering "voice", what kind of collective relations is it offering?

The distance at the heart of many lyric occasions also suggests that the "communion" Warner believes poetry establishes between writer and reader is very much not communion in the way he means. If anything, as in the elegy in the *Mechanics' Free Press*, the author expresses anxiety over the solipsistic nature of such communion with his reader. Try as he might to imagine or conjure his wife, this conjuring feels violent and unfair such that distance may need to be kept. This suggests that the poem is interested in equality but not via communion between writer and reader.

Finally, rather than merely serve as the genre for the revelation of deep or hidden personal thoughts, most lyric poems trafficked in largely generic and otherwise highly visible affect. This suggest that instead of the structure of disclosure or confession, many lyric poets utilized a structure that Virginia Jackson has referred to as an "open secret" model. In this way, the motivating point of the act of writing was the exchange of widely shared rather than particular emotional responses. In addition to lamenting the challenges of sharing or expressing emotion, many poems – and in particular those invested in the trope of the female poetess – were opportunities to, as Shira Wolosky suggests, "make voluble one's reticence" to speak. In other words, lyric poems were opportunities to successfully communicate at least one emotion (among many more that were hard): the



reluctance to share emotions. As a result, most lyric subjects were not the restrained subject now freed to express love; rather they were the subject expressing the communicative obstacles that were the condition of his or her communicative exchange.

All of this suggest that lyric poems were public texts; but as public texts, they played with the relation between writer and reader. One final example as to the difference between poems and the public texts of the public sphere can help clarify my take. Poems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like the editorials of political critique, had their apotheosis in print. This allies them with the public texts in the ways I have been advocating. But poets often used the occasion of this public and printed exchange to demand a different relation with the writer. Compare, for example, the depiction of writing between Alexis de Tocqueville's account of the American publishing world and by the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow of printed poems. Alexis de Tocqueville's characterization of the stunted literary world in the American postrevolutionary context, "American bookshops" loom large as a productive space of the literary public. In addition to Tocqueville's more widely known comments on the American comfort with derivative copies of European master works (and the implicit irreverence they had for who had authored what) was his depiction of the ephemera of "pamphlets which are circulated for a day with incredible rapidity, and then expire" (568). This depiction of the relationship between a disinterest in the specific author and the propensity to discard or let the pages of print periodicals "expire" after the ideas have been extracted sits oddly with accounts of how printed poems were imagined and empirically consumed, if new research on reception and circulation are correct.

Compare this to the depiction of how Longfellow wants his readers to treat his poems. Asking his imagined the reader to “hold” onto his poems or arrange them in their domestic life, he asks the reader to “linger” with the text longer than they would with a printed newspaper. Unlike the uses of print to which newspapers put their words to use – printed, read, discarded – many poetic texts asked their readers to stay with the book after its reception. This is far more investment in the material and after-life of the text after reception. Indeed, its poem’s “published” forms, they often circulated anonymously outside of books in giftbooks, travel brochures, and advertisements. In its unpublished or portfolio form, poetry was often exchanged, transcribed by hand, and “cop[ied] or clip[ed] into a scrap book, G 24). In this process that several scholars have considered a kind of “personalizing” process (Kete 26), undertaken with a view neither “toward or away from publication” (Jackson 58), what we might think of as the proper direction of public material (moving form private to public) was reversed through the practice of transcription (Jackson 58). Printed poetic texts – texts with poetic marks on them – were therefore taken as keepsakes, often added to domestic spaces. Printed poems too seemed to find their apotheosis in print, but it was in a different way.

#### IV. Conclusion:

The existence of the poetic utterance as the purely subjective, expressive and communal utterance is extremely limited and reductive of the action on the page. The genre of the lyric, an phenomenology of several 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers received by 20<sup>th</sup> century literary scholars and now 21<sup>st</sup> century political theorists, is perpetuated even in

this problematic way. It forces us to ask what investments we have in perpetuating this as a genre: why something like the lyric “I” or poetic utterance becomes, in the case of 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic theorists who get to either lament it as overly subjective or as radically democratic. However, if these features don’t quite apply to most lyric poems, what do we make of the political categories to which they purportedly correspond? I have been resisting some, though not all, of the generic distinctions between lyric poetry and ratio-critical deliberation. But if those distinctions are not as clear, then what do we make of forms of collective voice, self-representation, and equality that poetry becomes associated with in the American postrevolutionary context?

While 19<sup>th</sup> century lyric poetry was not a site for subjective expression or collective voice, this does not mean that it did not offer an orientation to communal life. Perhaps obviously, the dramas of precommitment, public affection, or constitutional patriotism that democratic theorists look for in the world may play out in poetry, but they do not play out in the same terms we have been using. As a historical-institutional inquiry, I remain interested in the institutions that may give form to these practices and do not assert that because poetry did not, they are therefore irrelevant concepts in 19<sup>th</sup> century postrevolutionary America. My argument is that poetry gets incorrectly roped into, and perhaps shapes, these political concepts by virtue of a limited reading of the lyric. Lyric poems were invested in their own mode and method of writing and reading, which makes them a source for understanding how denizens of the public sphere imagined various forms of printed texts.

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